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SUBJECT: (U) Secretary Clinton's January 22, 2010  
conversation with Yemeni Foreign Minister

Abu Bakr al-Qirbi

[1](#)1. (U) Classified by NEA Assistant Secretary  
Jeffrey D. Feltman. Reason: 1.4 (d).

[1](#)2. (U) January 21, 2010; 2:45pm; Washington, DC, USA

[1](#)3. (SBU) Participants:

U.S.

The Secretary

NEA A/S Jeff Feltman

S/CT Ambassador Daniel Benjamin

PA A/S P.J. Crowley

Andrew MacDonald (notetaker)

Yemen

Foreign Minister AbuBakr al-Qirbi

Ambassador Abdulwahab al-Hajjri

Minister Abdulhakim al-Eryani

Political Officer Khaled al-Kathiri

Public Affairs Officer Mohammed al-Basha

Diplomatic Attache Belal A. Abdo

[1](#)4. (S) SUMMARY. Secretary Clinton met with Yemeni  
Minister of Foreign Affairs Abu Bakr al-Qirbi on January

[1](#)21. The two discussed Yemen's renewed focus on counter  
terrorism and how the U.S. could best support these  
efforts, including counter radicalization efforts  
designed to limit the potential for future terrorist  
recruitment. The FM asserted that his country's  
problems were a result of insufficient international  
assistance and the Secretary noted that assistance  
needed to go hand in hand with economic reform and  
political dialogue. Both agreed on their desire for a  
productive meeting in London on January 27 where  
international support for Yemen could be consolidated.  
The Yemenis argued that the Houthi conflict in northern  
Yemen was fomented and supported by Iran, a claim the  
U.S. disputed, encouraging a diplomatic solution to the  
conflict. The Secretary raised her concern at continued  
problems with diplomatic pouch shipments at Sana'a  
International Airport, the FM responded that this was  
being resolved between his ministry and the Embassy and  
that additional trust would go a long way toward  
lessening this bilateral irritant. END SUMMARY.

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COUNTER TERRORISM  
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[1](#)5. (S) The Secretary and Foreign Minister began the  
meeting with a discussion of Yemen's counter terrorism  
(CT) efforts, with the Secretary noting that the U.S.  
continues to partner with Yemen to face the common  
threat of Al-Qaida. The Foreign Minister responded that  
he had discussed this issue at all of his meetings in  
Washington this week, noting that this was an issue that  
involved not only fighting terrorists, but also dealing  
with the root causes of radicalization. The U.S. is  
helping Yemen "do the job on its own" the FM added, and  
this is far better than the U.S. trying to conduct CT  
operations on foreign soil.

[1](#)6. (S) The FM requested additional U.S. assistance with  
its CT forces' transportation needs, noting that  
currently their armed forces were unable to travel to  
remote parts of the country, or conduct sensitive site  
exploitation of sites struck by air, due to their  
limited air transport abilities.

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ASSISTANCE  
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[1](#)7. (C) To counter radicalization, the FM asserted,  
Yemen needs economic development, which means more

economic assistance from international donors, including in particular Yemen's neighbors. Throughout the meeting he drove home this point, including asserting that as security assistance increases to Yemen, so too should development assistance. If they do not go up in tandem, the FM warned, the people of Yemen will not understand the U.S. is trying to help them. The Secretary responded that the U.S. was increasing development and security assistance to help stabilize Yemen. We are encouraged, she continued, by Yemen's own economic reform efforts, including President Saleh's 10-point plan, and that the U.S. wanted to help leverage support for Yemen. Yemenis are entrepreneurial and need to see opportunities inside of Yemen.

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LONDON MEETING  
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¶8. (C) On the London Meeting on January 27, the FM noted that the Prime Minister, Ali Mujawar, would represent Yemen along with the Deputy Prime Ministers for Security and Economic Development. He will also attend and the Secretary responded that she looked forward to meeting with them in London. The Secretary explained that the U.S. expected the London meeting to bring additional attention and support to Yemen to assist it with its development and security. The core principles of helping Yemen secure its borders, maintain its unity, provide for its people, and deny safe haven for terrorists; and the necessity of economic and political reforms to achieve these ends were cited by Secretary Clinton as overriding goals.

¶9. (C) The Foreign Minister explained that his government's goals were to see the international community support increased assistance to help Yemen face its economic, security, and counter-radicalization challenges. Development assistance should match security assistance, he asserted (again). Yemen's unity was paramount and a strong message on this issue was important for the Yemeni people. The southerners who want to separate from the country risk fragmenting the state and causing anarchy, he claimed. Let Yemen resolve its own internal issues and address these grievances, the FM continued. Outside mediators will not work, if you invite Egypt to mediate the Qataris will be upset, if you invite Qatar everyone else will complain. President Saleh himself is planning a national dialogue with the political opposition, the southerners, the Houthis, everyone, on January 31.

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HOUTHI CONFLICT  
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¶10. (S) The Secretary then raised the Houthi conflict in northern Yemen, asserting that there was no military solution and that it was straining the resources of the Yemeni government, which could be going towards CT efforts and to support the country's development. We need a ceasefire, she continued, and demonstrating the government's resolve to settle the conflict through dialogue was important, even though the Houthi rebels had proven in the past to be untrustworthy.

¶11. (S) The FM responded with a history of the Houthi conflict, claiming that every time the government had attempted to settle with these rebels, they had taken advantage of the armistice to rearm and take more territory. The government needs to take a tough stance with the Houthis this time or it will look weak to its opponents and lose credibility with the Yemeni people. The Houthi demands (freedom of worship, speech, assembly) were already protected by Yemen's constitution he claimed, implying that these claims were not the basis for their grievance. They are supported by Iran and are like Hizbullah or Hamas, he continued, and they must be dealt with militarily so that they reach a point where compromise is possible.

¶12. (S) The Secretary disagreed with the FM's assertion that Iran was supporting the Houthis, noting that the U.S. continues to see no hard evidence of Iranian involvement. The FM responded that they had evidence,

including the capture of an Iranian vessel, but provided no further details. A/S Feltman followed up on this line of reasoning, noting concern in the USG that, while Iran was not militarily involved now, it would seek to become more involved due to the opportunity created by the conflict and by the rhetoric against Iran from Yemen and Saudi Arabia. This needs to be settled now, he asserted, before it becomes much broader.

¶13. (S) The FM agreed that, in the end, there needed to be dialogue and development to truly end the problems in the north, but did not believe this was possible absent a military victory. The Houthis recently accepted the government's five principles and the government had responded to their entreaties; however the FM noted that the Houthis had to begin to implement these principals before their professions of peace could be believed.

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DIPLOMATIC POUCHES  
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¶14. (SBU) On the issue of diplomatic pouch shipments for Embassy Sana'a, the Secretary raised our concerns that pouch shipments were being held up and that an agreement signed years ago to limit shipments to 10/week was not reasonable in light of the increased levels of personnel and assistance transiting through Sana'a airport. Many of the shipments held up, Secretary Clinton explained, are designed for use by U.S. personnel providing training and assistance to the government of Yemen. The FM responded that he had expected to discuss this issue, and that he had been working with the Embassy in Sana'a to address our concerns. There is a problem of trust, he explained, and the U.S. Embassy needs to better detail its shipment contents so that there are no surprises. Telecommunications equipment is particularly concerning, he added, as it may interfere with the wavelengths of equipment used by the Yemeni government. While the MFA is merely an intermediary in this discussion, the FM asserted that he expected this to not be an issue in the future with better communication between the U.S. and Yemen.

CLINTON